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ABSTRACT

Data from two national surveys originally designed to measure public attitudes toward science and technology were examined to determine the relationships among several variable characteristics of the survey population and their attentiveness to local school politics. Survey respondents were divided into two groups: those who indicated they were both "very interested" and "very well informed" about local school issues, and those who were either less interested, less well informed, or both. Log-linear path analysis was used to reveal multivariate as well as bivariate relationships among the the variables tested, which included gender, age, parental status, educational level, and place of residence. Many significant relationships were found among the variables. The variable most closely related to attentiveness was parental status, a relationship found in every category into which the respondents were subdivided. The least strong association was between residence and attentiveness. Higher levels of education were strongly related to attentiveness, particularly among nonparents. Respondents between 30 and 49 years old were more likely to be attentive than those of other age groups, and women were more likely to be attentive than men. The findings showed that the social science concept of issue attentiveness is applicable to local school politics. A four-page bibliography is included. (PGD)

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Attentiveness to Local School Politics: A Structural Analysis

A paper presented to the 1985 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association

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I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

A major problem facing educators in the 1980s is how to assess the impact of public opinion on educational finances and policies. An accurate assessment of public opinion is important because public education exists in the political domain. Educational services must compete with other public services for tax revenues. Laws which form the foundation of school governance are enacted by the state legislatures. Policies that govern local schools are established by elected or appointed boards of education. All political decisions, whether regarding taxation, legislation, or public policies ultimately rest on public opinion. In democratic theory, public opinion is expressed in the voting booth, but public opinion is also expressed through opinion polls, interest groups, and individual interested citizens. An accurate understanding of public opinion and its potential impact on political decisions is crucial for effective local school decisions.

The results of public opinion polls offer little encouragement to educators. The Gallup Polls on the public's attitudes toward the public schools have served as barometers of public opinion since 1968. These polls have indicated that the public's ratings of the local public schools have changed dramatically since 1974.

Beginning in 1974, respondents were asked the question:

> Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here--A, B, C, D, or Fail? (Gallup, 1984, p. 25)

In 1974, 18 percent of the respondents rated their local public schools with an "A." By 1984, only 10 percent gave their local schools this top rating. In 1974, 48 percent rated local education with either an "A" or "B." By 1984, 42 percent gave their local schools these ratings. The percentage giving a "C" rating, meanwhile, has increased from 21 percent to 35 percent. Finally, a particularly disappointing aspect of the reported public opinion trend is that the number of respondents rating their local public schools with either a "D" or "Fail" has increased from 11 percent in 1974 to 15 percent in 1984.

Local school officials need to have a working knowledge of public opinion as it relates to their local school political arena. School officials need to know which citizens in their community are most receptive to information about local educational issues. They also need to know which citizens are most easily mobilized for

action in the local school political arena to vote, contact school officials about issues, or participate in school organizations. School officials in many communities will need to make judgments about the local political climate before they go to the voters for approval of tax increases, bond issues, or educational budgets. Other school officials may need to secure community approval for school closing.

The two-fold purpose of this paper is to contribute to the development of theoretical dimensions of local school politics and to provide school officials with a practical view of the structure of public opinion as it relates to local school politics. Established social science models which have been shown to have utility in the assessment of general political attitudes and behavior will be applied to local school politics. Multivariate analysis of categorical data will permit the determination of relationships among characteristics of citizens who are attentive to local school politics. The results of this study will have practical implications for local school officials in the assessment of the political climate of the school district.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The issue of the legitimate role of the citizen within a democratic society has been a topic of interest to political theorists for centuries. Easton (1965) argues that the existence of a democratic government requires that public opinion play an important role in determining public policy. Public opinion has a political implication. Citizens within the society generate individual interests which collectively form the total public interest. This collective opinion forms the basis for policy.

Individual citizens, however, vary in the amounts of influence that they exert on policy making. Some citizens express opinions; some do not. Some citizens act on their convictions; others remain passive. The public opinion researcher must attempt to identify those citizens whose opinions are most likely to have an impact on political policy. An essential issue facing the public opinion researcher is how to separate the opinions of the total citizenry into the opinions of the sub-publics which exert varying amounts of influence.

Almond (1950), Rosenau (1961), and Ippolito, Walker, and Kolson (1976) have presented models that have divided the general citizen population into various categories

based on their participation, influence, and attentiveness to public political issues. These models take into consideration both the psychological nature of man and the nature of twentieth century American society.

Two assumptions which are basic to an understanding of these models were presented by Almond (1950). The first is that society is complex, with many public, political issues. This complexity is increasing continuously. Increases in population, urbanization and industrialization coupled with rapidly expanding communication abilities have created issues and problems of a sociological, scientific, and political nature that were not present even 100 years ago. Twentieth-century man is confronted with a multitude of issues and information sources. While it may have been possible to keep abreast of most public issues a century ago by reading a newspaper and talking to neighbors, that is no longer possible today.

A second assumption is that any person can only pay attention to a limited number of issues. Since there are a multitude of public issues and information sources, each person must pick and choose which ones he will attend to and become informed about. It is the distribution of the

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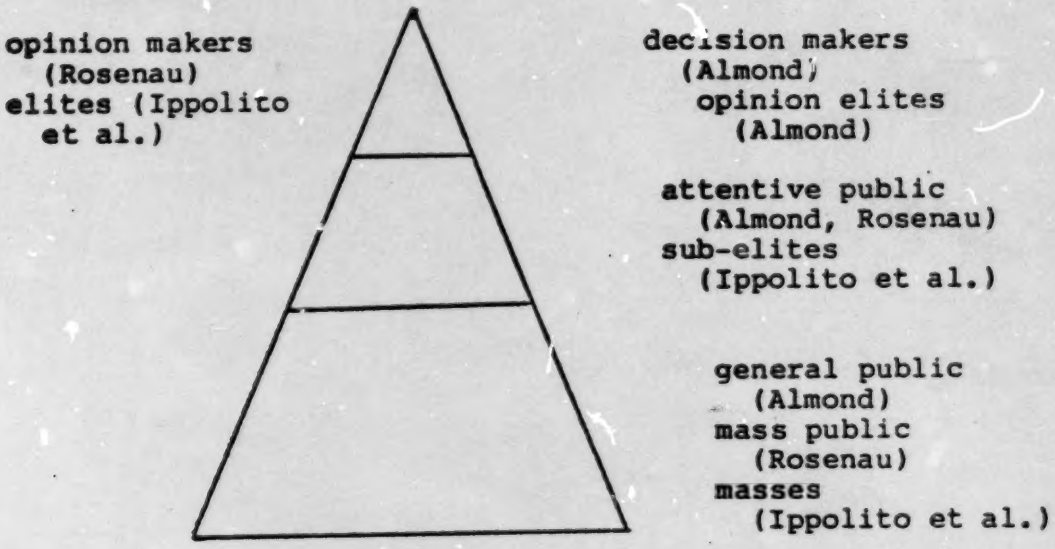
general citizen population about the various issues that forms the basis of the various "publics" within society.

For any public political issue, each member of the general citizen population falls into one of three groups. These three groups form a pyramid shaped hierarchy (see Figure 1). The first group can be labeled the general public (Almond), the mass public (Rosenau) or the masses (Ippolito et al.). This is the largest group and forms the base of the population pyramid. Individuals within this group are neither interested nor informed about the political issue in question; neither do they participate in the political process. Members of the mass public may, however, choose to leave this group by becoming interested and informed about the given issue in question.

The second group is the attentive public (Almond, Rosenau) or the sub-elites (Ippolito et al.). Members of this group are both informed and interested about the political issue in question. Individuals within this group actively follow the issue, but may not necessarily participate actively in the political process. The attentives or sub-elites, however, collectively constitute an audience for the third group, the elites.

The elites are referred to as opinion makers (Rosenau), decision makers and opinion elites (Almond) or

Figure 1. The Stratification of Public Opinion



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simply elites (Ippolito et al.). These individuals are the policy-bearing stratum of the population. Members of this group are elected or appointed officials, professionals within organizations or businesses, media representatives, or people with personal followings (prominent clergymen, etc.).

The dynamics of the public opinion model have been described by Miller (1983a). Public policy is formulated within the structure outlines above. Frequent policy-related dialogue is typical between decision makers and elites. When agreement has been reached between these policy leaders and decision makers on a specific issue, the policy decision is made, with no wider public participation in the process. When disagreements occur among the members of the leadership elites and decision makers, one or more segments of the leadership group may directly appeal to the attentive public. The elites most often seek this support by soliciting letters, visits, and other forms of pressure from the attentive public to other members of elites and decision makers with opposing views. This process of persuading members of the attentive public to make contact with the decision makers for a specific policy outcome is called mobilization.

On other occasions, if the initial attempts to mobilize the attentive public are insufficient in bringing about the desired policy change, the elites may attempt to appeal to the general public. Often, however, decision makers and elites waste resources by attempting to contact and mobilize both the attentives and general public at the same time. These attempts are rarely successful and are generally based on a misunderstanding of the hierarchy model of public opinion.

The Public Opinion model presents a useful structure for viewing public attitudes, opinions, and participation. Using this model, public opinion data should be viewed in terms of public groups, who will vary according to their interest, knowledge, and influence. Presumably, the opinion of the attentive public for local school issues will be of more consequence to the educational elites and decision makers than the opinions of the general public. The opportunity for mass participation is available, however, and members of the general public may move into the attentive public if they become sufficietly interested and informed about local school issues. The general public may also be drawn into the debate on various educational issues through the appeal of the elites who are attempting to gather support.

III. PROBLEM, DATA BASE AND STATISTICAL PROCEDURE

The data for this study was drawn from two national surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory at Northern Illinois University during 1981 and 1983. The 1981 survey was designed by Miller and Prewitt, and was funded by the Science Indicators Unit of the National Science Foundation. The 1983 survey was designed by Miller, Gerbner, and Signorielli, and was funded by the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Each survey was based on a national probability sample of the adult population of the United States and was designed to measure public attitudes toward science and technology, utilizing the Almond model of issue attentiveness. Although these surveys were primarily designed to gather information about the attitudes of the attentive public for organized science, survey data can also be used to describe the attentive publics for a variety of other public political issues, including local school issues.

In this study, the two samples (1981 and 1983) were partitioned on the basis of attentiveness to local school politics. The sample populations were then sub-divided into various sub-samples based on the theoretical relationships between several citizen characteristics and

attentiveness. These characteristics included age, gender, education, parental status, and community size.

The statistical approach used in this paper is log-linear path analysis. This technique was developed by Goodman (1972a, 1972b) and Fienberg (1977). Path analysis allows the researcher to generate log-linear models showing multivariate, rather than bivariate relationships. In the attentiveness model, it was possible to determine the relationships between and among the independent variables of gender, age, educational level, parental status, and residence. It was also possible to identify the unique bivariate relationships between each of these variables and attentiveness, the dependent variable, while holding the others constant. Finally, the additive contribution of each variable to the model of attentiveness was also identified.

Three statistical terms are used extensively in log-linear path analysis. These are standardized lambda (L), likelihood ratio chi-square (LRX^2), and coefficient of multiple-partial determination (CMPD). Standardized lambdas (L) are used to indicate the existence of a "significant" association between two variables. In such an association, the response pattern of the sample

respondents when separated according to the subcategories of an independent variable differ significantly when measured against the dependent variable. Under the null hypothesis of no differences, standardized lambdas are normally distributed with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Standardized lambdas of $\pm$ 1.96 or greater are assumed to be statistically significanto at .05 or greater. The .05 ($L=\alpha.05$) level of significance will be used throughout this study to indicate the existence of a significant association.

The likelihood ratio chi-square (LRX^2) is conceptually similar to the Pearson chi-square. Under the null hypothesis, the expected distribution of responses among the subcategories of an independent variable would be equal to the overall distribution of the dependent variable. When large differences occur between expected and observed frequencies, a large LRX^2 results. In a multivariate model, a large LRX^2 indicates that one or more of the independent variables is closely associated with, or "explains" the dependent variable.

An important difference, however, exists between likelihood ratio chi-square and Pearson chi-square. Where the Pearson chi-square utilizes the arithmetic mean,

likelihood ratio chi-square utilizes the geometric mean. Likelihood ratio chi-squares sum to unity, accounting for all of the total mutual dependence among the independent variables and the dependent variable. Every portion of the LRX can be attributed to either the main effects or interaction effects.

The coefficient of multiple partial determination (CMPD) is analogous to the multiple variance (r^2) in regression analysis. CMPD is used to determine the total proportion of the LRX^2 attributable to one or more of the independent variables in a multivariate model. The total LRX^2 is an indication of the amount of the total mutual dependence among the independent variables and the dependent variable. If the LRX^2 associated with any one independent variable is divided by the total LRX^2, the resulting proportion indicates the proportion of total mutual dependence associated with that independent variable. This proportion is labeled the coefficient of multiple partial determination CMPD.

Almond (1950) described members of an attentive public as displaying a high level of interest in a topic, possessing an adequate level of current information on the subject, and committed to a pattern of informaton acquisition that would assure a continuing level of

knowledgeability. Attentiveness was operationally defined by Miller, Prewitt, and Pearson (1980), Miller, Suchner, an Voelker (1980), and Miller (1983) as an individual's expression of interest and knowledge in a given topic. Within this context, the 1981 and 1983 surveys created attentiveness variables on a number of issues using two specific items.

> There are a lot of issues in the world today and it is hard to keep up with every area. I am going to read a short list of issues and for each one--as I read it--I would like you to tell me if you are interested, moderately interested, or not at all interested in that particular issue.
>
> Now, I'd like to go through this list with you again and for each issue I'd like for you to tell me if you are very well informed about that issue, moderately well informed, or poorly informed. (Questions 2 & 3, 1981; Questions 2 & 3, 1983.)

Respondents who indicated that they were both "very interested" and "very well informed" were classified as "attentive" to the issue in question. Each survey (1981 and 1983) gave respondents an opportunity to express their interest and knowledge of several public political issues,

including "local school issues."[1] Those citizens who answered that they were "very interested" and "very well informed" about "local school issues" are classified for this study as the "attentive public for local school politics."

IV. FINDINGS: THE ATTENTIVENESS MODEL

The first step in developing the attentiveness model is to describe the structural relationships that exist among the independent variables (see Figure 2). In both 1981 and 1983, women were significantly more likely than men to report parental status. In 1981, 39 percent of the females and 33 percent of the males ($L=4.2$, $\alpha<.001$) reported having children at home. In 1983, 40 percent of the females and 38 percent of the males were parents

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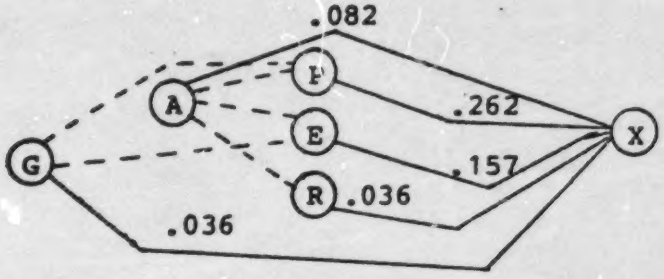
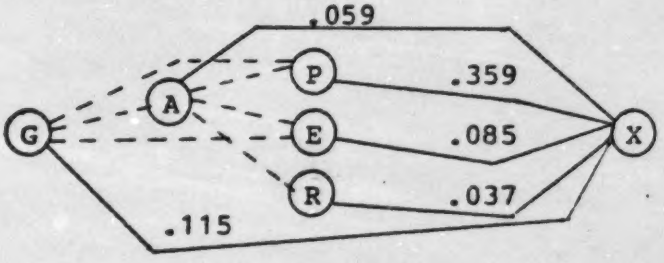
[1] A list of several issues followed this statement. In 1981 the list included: International and foreign ppolicy issues, Agricultural and farm issues, Local School issues, Issues about new scientific discoveries, Economic issues and business conditions, Issues about the use of new inventions and technologies, Women's rights issues, Issues about energy policy, and Issues about space exploration. The 1983 list included: International and foreign policy issues, Issues about space exploration, Issues about new scientific discoveries, Economic issues and business conditions, Issues about the use of new inventions and technologies, Issues about crime and violence, Local school issues, Issues about energy policy, Issues about military and defense policy.

Figure 2. The Attentive Public for Local School Politics, 1981 and 1983 (Actual Models)

1981



1983



Legend

G:	gender	E:	educational level
A:	Age	R:	residence
P:	parental status	X:	attentiveness to local school politics

Dotted lines denote significant relationships among independent variables.
Solid lines denote significant relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable.
CMPD indicates unique contribution of each independent variable on dependent variable.

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(L=3.8, α.001). In addition, age and gender interacted significantly with parental status in the 1983 sample. In the 18-29 age group, 57 percent of the females, but only 24 percent of he males, were parents. While men and women differed in the rate of parental status across the three age categories, this difference was significantly greatest in the youngest age group in 1983.

Gender is also significantly related to educational level. Respondents were divided into two educational groups. The first group contained all respondents who had earned an associate dgree, bachelor's degree, graduate degree (master, Ph.D.) or other professional degree. The second group contained those who had a high school diploma or less. In 1981, 23 percent of the total respondents were in the higher education category. In 1981, males were more likely to have a college degree than were females, 31 percent to 23 percent (L=4.9, α.001). In 1983, 36 percent of the total sample reported having earned an associate degree or higher. Once again, males were more likely to fall in the higher education group than were females, 42 percent to 32 percent (L=3.4, α.01).

Finally, a significant relationship was also found between gender and age in 1983. The 1983 sample was 55 percent female. In the 50 and over age goup, almost two-thirds or 64.2 percent were women (L=5.1,α.001).

In both 1981 and 1983, age was significantly related to parental status, and educational level. Respondents in the 30-49 age group were more likely to report parental status than were those in either the 18-29 or 50 and over age groups. A large majority of all respondents between the ages of 30 and 49 in both samples were parents. In 1981, 62 percent reported parental status (L=23.0, α.001), and in 1983, 68 percent reported parental status (L=18.3, α.001). The age 50 and over group was least likely to have children living at home. Only 12 percent in the 1981 sample (L=-17.5, α.001) and 9 percent in the 1983 sample (L=-13.9, α.001) reported parental status.

In 1981, 23 percent of the total respondents were in the higher education category. Within the 30-49 age group, however, 49 percent reported having at least two years of college (L=23.0, α.001). The age 50 and older group reported the lowest percentage of college graduates, with 20 percent falling into the higher education category.

In 1983, 36 percent of the total sample reported having earned an associate degree or higher. As was the case in 1981, those aged 30-49 were more likely to fall into this group than were either the 18-29 year olds or those age 50 plus (L=6.0, α.01). Of the three age categories, the 50 plus group was again the least likely

to report having earned a college degree (L=-6.1, α.01). Gender was also significantly related to educational level. Males were more likely to fall into the higher education group than were females, 42 percent to 32 percent (L=3.4, α.01). In 1983 the age 30-49 category a majority of the males reported having earned an associate degree or higher. This was the only age/gender category with a majority of college graduates.

A significant relationship was also found between age and residence. Respondents were divided into two residence groups. Those living in standard metropolitan areas (SMAs) were categorized as "metropolitan." All other respondents were classified as "non-metropolitan." In both 1981 and 1983, approximately 70 percent of all respondents lived in metropolitan areas. In 1981, respondents between ages 30 and 49 were most likely to live in metropolitan areas (L=3.0, α.01). Those age 50 and over were least likely to live in an urban area (L=-2.7, α.01). In 1983, respondents aged 18-29 (L=2.7, α.05) and aged 30-49 (L=3.2, α.01) were more likely to live in metropolitan areas than were respondents age 50 plus (L=-6.2, α.001).

The second step in the construction of the attentiveness model is to determine the unique contribution or strength of association between each

independent variable and attentiveness, the dependent variable. This determination is possible under log-linear path analysis by holding constant all of the relationships between and among the independent variables and between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The unique association between the independent variable under consideration and the dependent variable is then deleted and measured.

Attentives were identified throughout this study as citizens who perceived themselves as very knowledgeable and interested in local school politics. This attentive group was a minority in both the 1981 and 1983 samples (see Table 1). In 1981, 25 percent of all respondents were attentive to local school politics. In 1983, 28 percent were attentive.

Of all the identified characteristics, the closest relationship appears to exist between parental status and attentiveness. In 1981, 38 percent of all parents were attentive to local school politics, while 21 percent of non-parents were attentive. In 1983, the percentage of parents who were attentive was slightly larger, at 41 percent. The percentage of attentive non-parents was smaller at 18 percent. Parents were significantly more likely to be attentive than were non-parents in both 1981 ($L=10.5$, $\alpha .001$) and 1983 ($L=9.7$, $\alpha .001$).

Table 1

Attentive Public for Local School Politics,
1981 and 1983, Bivariate Relationships

	Percent Attentive		N	
Variable	1981	1983	1981	1983
All Adults	25%	*28%	3410	1631
Parental Status				
Parent	38	41	1140	635
Non-parent	21	*18	2000	996
Educational Level				
AA or more	35	33	838	575
HS or less	24	24	2302	1054
Residence				
Metro	26	26	182	1115
Non-metro	30	29	058	516
Age				
18-29	21	20	888	411
30-49	35	35	1188	664
50+	22	23	1066	546
Gender				
Male	24	21	1482	729
Female	29	32	1658	902

*Increase in proportion from 1981 to 1983, significant at $\alpha=.05$.

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Parents were more attentive than non-parents in every comparable education, residence, age, and gender group with 10 or more respondents (see Table 2). In 1981, when the overall attentiveness rate was 25 percent, four parent groups consisted of more than 50 percent attentives. In 1983, when the overall attentiveness rate was 28 percent, three parent groups consisted or more than 50 percent attentives. Among non-parents only one group in either year was 50 percent attentive.

The unique relationship between parental status and attentiveness was greater than that of any of the other variables in both 1981 and 1983. In 1981, parental status accounted for 26.2 percent of the total mutual dependence among all of the independent variables and attentiveness. In 1983, the bivariate association between parental status and attentiveness accounted for 35.9 percent of the total mutual dependence (see Logit Model H5, Table 3) in the attentiveness model.

This finding that parental status is closely associated with attentiveness to local school politics is consistent with the findings of Salisbury (1980) in his study of St. Louis area schools. Salisbury found that parental status was a "trigger" that propelled citizens in local school activities. Parental status, therefore, can be seen as a predisposing factor that leads to interest

Table 2

Gender, Age, Residence, Education, Parental Status, and Attentiveness to Local School Politics, 1981 and 1983

Gender	Age	Res.	Educ.	Percent Attentive				N			
				Parent		Non-parent		Parent		Non-parent	
				81	83	81	83	81	83	81	83
Total				38%	41%	21%	18%	1140	637	2000	983
M	18-29	SMA	AA+	33	27	11	9	15	15	76	53
			HS-	17	14	12	4	54	14	163	71
		Non-SMA	AA+	35	--	24	--	17	3	21	6
			HS-	35	28	14	6	20	11	76	35
	39-49	SMA	AA+	47	37	32	12	75	82	87	57
			HS-	32	39	18	3	157	78	97	35
		Non-SMA	AA+	74	39	18	--	31	23	17	9
			HS-	39	27	19	18	66	30	31	17
	50+	SMA	AA+	33	--	17	25	15	3	72	36
			HS-	27	--	20	15	26	8	210	74
		Non-SMA	AA+	--	--	23	36	5	6	26	11
			HS-	36	--	22	21	11	4	114	48
F	18-29	SMA	AA+	27	35	22	30	26	20	58	39
			HS-	28	38	21	15	72	48	149	55
		Non-SMA	AA+	33	--	--	42	12	5	9	12
			HS-	44	35	22	19	52	20	68	16
	30-49	SMA	AA+	52	44	40	31	83	70	54	32
			HS-	38	46	18	18	207	111	103	33
		Non-SMA	AA+	66	78	25	--	32	18	12	9
			HS-	37	55	28	32	95	40	39	22
	50+	SMA	AA+	55	--	35	41	11	4	54	41
			HS-	26	--	19	27	43	7	275	141
		Non-SMA	AA+	--	--	32	50	2	1	28	30
			HS-	23	56	17	12	13	16	161	101

Percents not reported for N <10.

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Table 3

Attentiveness Logit Models, 1981 and 1983

Logit Model		df	LRX^2 1981	LRX^2 1983	CMPD 1981	CMPD 1983
H1:	GAPER,X	47	224.37	202.73		
H2:	GAPER,XP,XR,XE	44	73.72	85.24	.671	.580
	Due to XP,XR,XE	3	150.65	117.49	.671	.580
H3:	GAPER,XP,XR,XE,XA	42	55.62	72.01	.758	.643
	Due to XA	2	18.10	13.27	.087	.065
H4:	GAPER,XP,XR,XE,XA,XG	41	47.51	48.71	.788	.760
	Due to XG	1	8.05	23.30	.036	.115
H5:	Unique effect of XP	1	58.84	72.79	.262	.359
H6:	Unique effect of XR	1	8.15	7.43	.036	.037
H7:	Unique effect of XE	1	35.25	17.15	.157	.085
H8:	Unique effect of XA	2	18.29	21.97	.082	.059
H9:	Unique effect of XG	1	8.05	23.32	.036	.115
H10:	GAPER,XP,XR,XA,XG, XEA (81) XER (83)	39	40.54	39.64	.825	.810
	Due to XEA, XER	2	7.03	9.07	.031	.045

Legend

G: gender
A: age
P: parental status
R: residence
E: education
X: attentiveness to local school politics
LRX^2: likelihood ratio chi-square
CMPD: coefficient of multiple partial determination
df: degrees of freedom

and knowledge about school issues. Parents become interested, knowledgeable and involved through their parental role. Parental status emerges as the most important factor in attentiveness to local school politics.

A relatively weak association appears to exist between residence and attentiveness. In both 1981 and 1983, residents of non-metropolitan areas tended to be slightly more attentive than those living in metropolitan areas. In 1981, this difference was 30 percent to 26 percent. In 1983, the margin was slightly narrower, at 29 percent to 26 percent. Respondents in non-metropolitan areas were significantly more attentive than those residing in metropolitan areas in both 1981 ($L=2.3$, $\alpha .05$) and 1983 ($L=2.8$, $\alpha .01$). But the strength of association between residence and attentiveness as the weakest in the attentiveness model. In 1981, residence uniquely accounted for 3.6 percent of the total mutual dependence (see Logit Model H6, Table 3). In 1983, the unique effect of residence was an almost identical 3.7 percent.

A strong relationship also appears to exist between educational level and attentiveness. Respondents in the "A.A. or more" category are more likey to be attentive than those in the "H.S. or less" category. This

difference was 35 percent to 24 percent in 1981 and 33 percent to 24 percent in 1983.

Education proved to be a stronger variable in 1981 than in 1983. In both years, respondents with an A.A. degree or higher were significantly more likely to be attentive than those with a high school diploma or less ($L=6.2$, $\alpha<.001$, in 1981 and $L=3.6$, $\alpha<.002$, in 1983). Education uniquely accounted for 15.7 percent of the total mutual dependence among all of the variables in 1981 (see Logit Model H7, Table 3). In 1983, education accounted for 8.5 percent of the total mutual dependence.

Throughout both samples, the relationship between education and attentiveness is particularly strong for non-parents. In every non-parent, metro by gender by age group, the percentage rate of attentiveness is higher for respondents with an A.A. degree than the rate for respondents with a high school diploma or less (see Table 2). Among parents, the effects of education are less clear. Education seems to make less impact on attentiveness among this group than does the fact that they have children of school age living at home.

In 1981, a significant interaction among education, age, and attentiveness was also found. Respondents aged 30-49 with an A.A. degree or higher were significantly more likely to be attentive than those in the other age

categories (L=2.3, α.05). This interaction accounted for an additional 3.1 percent of the total mutual dependence (see Logit Model H10, Table 3).

In 1983, education significantly interacted with residence in its association with attentiveness. In metropolitan areas, respondents with a high school diploma or less were more attentive than respondents with an associate degree or higher (L=3.0, α.01). In non-metropolitan areas, respondents with high educational status were more attentive than those with lower education status. This interaction accounted for an additional 4.5 percent of the total mutual dependence (see Logit Model H10, Table 3).

Middle-aged respondents, 30-49 years old, were more likely to be attentive than either the 18 to 29-year-olds or those over age 50. In both 1981 and 1983, 35 percent of all 30 to 49-year-olds were attentive. Younger and older respondents were less attentive. In the younger group, 21 percent were attentive in 1981 and 20 percent in 1983. Older respondents, age 50 and over, were slightly more attentive than 18 to 29-year-olds at 22 percent in 1981 and 23 percent in 1983.

Structural relationships between age and attentiveness were also found in both samples. In the 1981 sample, respondents aged 30-49 were found to be more

attentive than either of the other two age groups (L=3.8, α.001). In 1983, respondents age 50 and older were found to be the most attentive group (L=3.5, α.001). In both years, the 18 to 29-year-old group was least attentive. Age uniquely accounts for 8.2 percent of the total mutual dependence in 1981 and 5.9 percent in 1983 (see Logit Model H8, Table 3).

Finally, gender was also associated with attentiveness in both 1981 and 1983. In 1981, females were more attentive than males by a margin of 29 percent to 24 percent. In 1983, attentiveness among females had risen to 32 percent, while attentiveness among males had fallen to 21 percent.

Gender had a significant association with attentiveness in 1981 and 1983. In both years, women proved to be more attentive than men (L=4.7, α.001 in 1981; L=2.8, α.01 in 1983). Gender accounted for 3.6 percent of the total mutual dependence in 1981 and 11.5 percent in 1983 (see Logit Model H9, Table 3).

In 1983, the unique effect of gender was stronger than it was in 1981. Females were more attentive than were males in almost every comparable parent, education, residence, age group (see Table 2). After parental status, gender had the strongest direct association with attentiveness (see Figure 2). This strength of gender in

1983 is paralleled by the relative decrease in the strength of education. In 1983, 36 percent of all respondents reported having a college degree, compared to 23 percent in 1981. As education became less of a discriminating factor among respondents, gender increased. In 1981, much of the effect of gender went through education. In 1983, gender was more of a unique factor.

The final step in constructing the model of the attentive public for local school politics for 1981 and 1983 is to determine the best combination of variables that describes attentives. The models of attentiveness to local school politics proved to be remarkably similar over the two samples. The overall incidence of attentiveness was highly consistent with 25 percent of the 1981 sample and 28 percent of the 1983 sample claiming to be both highly interested and informed about local school politics. The structural relationships between the identified citizen characteristics and atteniveness were almost identical in 1981 and 1983. Parental status, residence, age, gender, and education were significantly related to attentiveess in both samples. In 1981, the total main effects of the independent variables accounted for 78.8 percent of the total mutual dependence in the attentiveness (see Logit Model H4, Table 3). In 1983, the same factors accounted for 76.0 percent. Parental status

led the way in both samples, explaining 26.2 and 35.9 percent of the total mutual dependence, respectively. Education proved to be a strong predictor of attentiveness in 1981, but not in 1983. Gender followed the opposite course, having a strong association in 1983 but not in 1981. Age accounted for 8.2 (1981) and 5.9 (1983) percent of the mutual dependence across the two samples. In 1983 the oldest group of respondents was most likely to be attentive, while in 1981, the 30 to 49-year-old age group was most attentive. Residence proved to be a statistically significant, but weak, variable in each year.

The best model of the attentive public for local school politics contains parental status, education, age, and gender. Each of these factors has a significant residual relationship with attentiveness, if the others are held constant. Residence, while having a significant residual relationship with attentiveness, added little to the overall pattern of attentiveness in either sample.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of issue attentiveness developed through the social science models of Almond, Rosenau, and Ippolito is applicable to local school politics. A clearly identifiable and highly consistent segment of the general population was found to perceive themselves as both

knowledgeable and interested in local school issues. This segment of citizens attentive to local school politics accounts for about 25 to 30 percent of the United States adult population age 18 and older. The actual size and composition of this attentive public will vary among locales, based on the characteristics of the populations of local school districts.

The most important single element in attentiveness is parental status. Parents of school age children are more knowledgeable and interested in local school issues than any other identified group. Children under age 18 are direct participants in school activities. Parents become informed about school issues through their children. Parents become interested in school issues because of their children's involvement. The linkage between parental status and attentiveness is directly traced to the participation of children in the school program.

The second most important factor in attentiveness to local school politics is educational status. Citizens who hold a college degree are more likely to be attentive than are citizens with a high school diploma or less. Educational status is a particularly strong factor for non-parents. Highly educated citizens are interested and knowledgeable about local school issues because of their commitment to education, as demonstrated by their college

degree. For parents, education is an additive factor; for non-parents, education is a primary cause for interest. Higher educated citizens are also more likely to gain interest and knowledge through their own educational experience and could be expected to be more aware of public political issues than are less educated citizens.

Age is also independently associated with attentiveness. Middle-aged citizens, age 30-49, are more likely to be attentive than are either younger or older citizens. Most of the relationships between age and attentiveness, however can be explained by other factors. The age 30-49 group is also most likely to be parents, and of higher educational status. For many middle-aged citizens, the path to attentiveness goes through either parental or educational status.

Gender, like age, is independently related to attentiveness, but is effects can also be best understood by its path through other variables. Young women are attentive through parental status. Young women, if attentive to local school issues, are also more likely to be parents than non-parents. For men, attentiveness can be explained through education or parental status. Men are more likely to be attentive if they also hold a college degree or have children living at home. Over

and above these relationships, women are more attentive than men.

The factors of age, education, and gender are less important than parental status. Age, education, and gender further refine or add to the likelihood of attentiveness, once parental status is known. Local school officials wishing to identify attentives should look first to parents of school age children.

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